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Testimony of Liam Lowney
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Boston City Council Hearing
Sexual Assault on College Campuses
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Good afternoon. My name is Liam Lowney and I am Chief of Victim Witness Services for Attorney General Martha Coakley. On behalf of Attorney General Coakley, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today and for your attention to this important issue.

We are encouraged by your focus on campus sexual assaults, as well that of the Obama Administration through the Department of Education's recent efforts to explain obligations to schools under Title IX. We believe combined efforts such as these will serve to enhance experiences for victims and survivors of sexual assault on college campuses in Boston and across Massachusetts. Today, I'd like to share some information about how the Attorney General's Office can support victims of sexual assault.

Sexual assault is considered the most under-reported violent act in our country. On college campuses, this lack of reporting can be exacerbated by the isolation that is inherent to college life. Away from home, students are away from an established support system. New college students, in particular, often don't have an authority figure they can trust or friends they can rely on, forcing them to suffer the impact of rape alone. Finally, many students do not want their parents to learn what happened from police, the school, or their health insurance providers, but are financially dependent upon them. Each of these factors creates an obstacle for victims attempting to seek out and employ the services they so desperately need.

Our office administers the Commonwealth's Victim Compensation and Assistance Program which is a fund of last resort that can provide eligible victims of violent crime up to \$25,000 of compensation for services not covered by other insurance programs. Established within the program's structure is the flexibility to meet the unique needs of this population of victims we are speaking about today. Through this program, our office has heard from hundreds of victims of sexual assault on campuses across the state. Perpetrators range from strangers to romantic partners. The one constant is the extreme trauma that these survivors endure in the aftermath of their attack.

One such case was a young woman on a local college campus who attended a party off the campus grounds. After being provided a drink from another student at the party, she woke up the next day disoriented. Her roommate encouraged her to go to a local ER where she received a forensic sexual assault exam by a SANE nurse. Frightened by the possibility of having contracted AIDS or a venereal disease, the student wanted to obtain the follow up medications prescribed by the ER physician. However, she did not wish to inform her parents of what had happened. The Victim Compensation program was able to assist her by paying for these important medications without having to use her parents' health insurance and therefore maintaining her privacy. Without this aid however, she could not have afforded the medications which totaled in excess of \$1500. This young woman was therefore able to receive this important care, and determine when, to whom, and in what way she wishes to speak about her experience.

We have also heard from students who have been sexually assaulted by strangers. In one case, a student assaulted by an unknown person in her apartment decided to leave school and travel to her home in another state. The decision to stay or leave school is not an uncommon dilemma for victims on college campuses. When she got home she sought out counseling to address the impact of the event in hopes that she would work to finish her bachelor's degree at a later time. Like many college students, she was listed on her parents' insurance. While they were aware of her assault, their insurance did not cover the out-of-network trauma specialist the young woman wanted to see for her care. As the crime occurred in Massachusetts, our program was able to provide her with reimbursement for the costs associated with seeing that specialist and get the care she required. For crimes occurring in Massachusetts, we are able to support students wherever they ultimately choose to live.

Another common occurrence is students who are victimized by their intimate partners. One student who utilized our program had been dating another college student for several years. After moving in together in hopes of saving money, this young woman's partner beat and raped her over several hours throughout one night causing significant physical injuries and trauma. After being found by a friend, the police were notified and she was treated at a local hospital and Rape Crisis Center. The Victim Compensation and Assistance program has been able to assist her with costs associated with her physical therapy and the removal of a scar on her face that has served as a constant physical reminder of that assault.

The unique impact on sexual assault victims on college campuses is real, is complicated, and replete with many obstacles for assistance and recovery. We are grateful to have the opportunity to work with you as you look for ways to ensure victims are heard, kept safe, and provided with the services they need for their recovery. The Victim Compensation Program is one such service and I hope everyone here will share this information with any victim who may need it.